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WHITEROCKS CANYON

Tar sands strip mining opposed

By Lezlee E. Whiting

Private property owners in Whiterocks Canyon asked Uintah County commissioners last week to oppose plans of Black Sands Energy that could eventually result in large scale strip mining in the scenic canyon 30 miles north of Vernal.

Whiterocks Canyon Property Owners Association chair Lewis Coopers said his in-depth research into the background of Black Sands Energy has left the group with mounting concerns.

"This is an unproven company with questionable economics," said Cooper, while meeting with county, state and federal officials representing agencies that have regulatory authority over Black Sands Energy's proposal to strip mine their 840-acre mineral lease.

Chief among the concerns cited by the canyon's 20 property owners is the potential strip mining would have to contaminate the Whiterocks River and an underground, unrestrained aquifer — both are major water sources for thousands of westside Uintah County residents.

Cooper, an engineer in the energy industry, told commissioners that his research has turned up information that shows the proposed project is environmentally and economically unsound.

"For each barrel of tar sands oil, no less than two tons of sand and clay must be mined," he said. "Extracting oil from the sands sucks up two-thirds of the energy they ultimately render, poisoning the atmosphere with carbon in the process."

Black Sands would have to remove over 200 feet of earth just to reach the tar sand deposits in Whiterocks Canyon, according to Cooper. Despite the excessive overburden, the company is reporting that they could produce oil from tar sands for between \$12 to \$20.60 a barrel.

Black Sands is partnered with Florida-based Nevtah Capital Management Corp. According to Nevtah's Web site, they have obtained millions from Korean investors interested in their Whiterocks Canyon project.

In Alberta, Canada, where tar sands are abundant and near the surface, it costs between \$36 to \$40 a barrel to produce oil

from tar sands, Cooper noted. In Canada and elsewhere strip mining is a water-intensive process, but Black Sands maintains their "closed loop" production process — billed as "benign and non-toxic," requires minimal water; one more claim by the company that troubles Cooper and others.

The majority of the canyon's property owners don't hold the mineral rights to their land. They were notified in April by Alan Propp, senior engineer with Black Sands Holding Company, that the Las Vegas-based company intends to begin doing core drilling — something that is not new to the canyon. Energy companies have engaged in drilling core samples for decades in order to gauge their level of interest in the canyon's tar sands deposits. So far none have found the area to be worth large, long-term investments.

Propp said earlier that Black Sands wants to be a "good neighbor" throughout all of their interaction with property owners and while conducting their business operations in the canyon.

"Black Sands will be required by the state to undertake a very extensive environmental impact assessment into which the public will have input as part of the large mine permit process," said Propp. "This study will eliminate the speculation ... regarding our operations and their potential impacts on the environment."

Cooper said he spoke with Propp who said he was planning to attend last week's meeting, however, he was not there.

State and county officials said that Black Sands has not obtained permits that are required before any work could begin. Ashley National Forest Supervisor Kevin Elliot also confirmed that the federal government must be included in the company's plans for energy development, but had not heard from them as of last week.

Whiterocks Canyon property owners said they will investigate the possible implementation of a zone change for the canyon, the current zoning allows mining — something they were aware of when purchasing their property.

Another venue they will research is Utah's Township Act. The act would allow them to

create their own township and govern it through applicable rules and regulations, including forming their own planning and zoning board, for example.

Commissioners said they are cognizant of the concerns of the canyon's property owners, but said county government must recognize the rights of everyone involved.

"These people with mineral rights have paid good money for them. When the county starts getting involved in something like this we walk a very fine line," said commissioner Dave Haslem.

Although Black Sands would have easy access to their lease through an existing paved road, they cannot get to that area without a right-of-way from the Ute Tribe. Tribal Business Committee member Ronald Groves told canyon property owners that may not fly.

The tribe must consider how access would impact tribal interests based on archeological issues, deer and elk migratory routes in the immediate area and nearby wetlands, said Groves.

RACERS

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said. Racers call the arena trucks "truggies," because they are based on the dune-buggy chassis but with a truck body, tires, and a longer suspension.

Every car has to have a transponder, a tiny radio that goes on the car and transmits a certain number that identifies each individual car.

Each time they pass the lap counter the counter keeps track of their speed. At the end the computer prints out all the data so that the driver knows how well they did, what place they are in and what class they are in.

An experienced driver can do a lap in 23 to 34 seconds.

Races are held from spring through autumn, every other weekend.

The track, located at 11000 North 30000 West in Neola, opens at 8 a.m. and the races start at 10 a.m. Racers can bring their friends and family members which adds to the fun. There is a \$5 per car entry fee for racers.

To get to the track, visit www.



Roosevelt Middle School student Naomi Manning uses her head instead of yearbook.

Flu vaccine firms plan to make record 132M doses for this fall

Flu vaccine manufacturers expect to have a record 132 million doses ready for the 2007-08 flu season, according to the Associated Press. Even more could be available if a fifth company joins their ranks, officials said last Thursday.

CSL Biotherapies, an Australian company, applied last month for federal approval to sell its flu vaccine in the United States this fall.

Government health officials have been expanding their flu shot recommendations to cover more age groups, and they now say that more than 200 million Americans should get vaccinated each year. But setbacks in recent years — including vaccine delays and shortages — have left doctors and patients soured and confused.

Officials say they are heartened by the increase in vaccine manufacturing.

Influenza kills an estimated 36,000 Americans each year and hospitalizes another 200,000, according to the CDC.

The manufacturer estimates for the next flu season were announced at a meeting of flu vaccine manufacturers, health-care providers and public health officials.

CSL would join four other companies providing flu vaccine in the United States. Three make flu shots — Sanofi Pasteur Inc., which projects 50 million doses; Novartis Vaccines, which expects to make up to 40 million doses; and GlaxoSmith-Kline, which is planning 30 mil-